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Wall, Barbara

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Dynamic Texts as Hotbeds for Transmedia Storytelling: A Case Study on the Story Universe of *The Journey to the West*

BARBARA WALL¹

University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Transmedia storytelling is often promoted as the future of storytelling. By Henry Jenkins' definition of transmedia storytelling, however, we can also find transmedia stories in the past. Taking *The Journey to the West* as a case study, I show how it is a transmedia story that started to unfold hundreds of years ago. Although *The Journey* is conventionally identified with a Chinese novel, most people are familiar with *The Journey* universe through films, comics, or computer games. Although Jenkins argues that transmedia stories are too broad to be grasped, I suggest that by approaching them as what Roland Barthes calls dynamic texts we can develop tools for comprehension and analysis. In this study, I demonstrate how such a tool might work by applying Barthes' concept to Korean variations of *The Journey*, and in particular by using tree diagrams and an animation to create a visual map of the story's elements.

Keywords: transmedia storytelling, dynamic texts, Henry Jenkins, Roland Barthes, radial tree diagrams, mapping, PHP/JavaScript application

Transmedia storytelling is often associated with digitalization, "Web 2.0," or simply the "future" (Costa-Zahn et al., 2011). New production and reception practices have definitely opened the doors to new transmedia storytelling experiences, while media convergence makes storytelling across multiple platforms inevitable (Jenkins, 2006, p. 104). In his essay "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections" (2011), however, Henry Jenkins argues that transmedia storytelling was possible even before "the rise of networked computing and interactive entertainment" (para. 18).

Transmedia storytelling has become such a popular term that it runs the risk of meaning everything and nothing. Before we can turn to the question of what belongs to the field of transmedia storytelling, however, we first need to know what transmedia storytelling is. *Transmedia* literally means "across media." It goes without saying that stories were told across different media long before digitalization, but for storytelling to be truly "transmedia," it is not enough to simply cross media forms. In this article, I use Jenkins' more specific definition of transmedia storytelling, which he developed in his

Barbara Wall: barbara.wall@hum.ku.dk

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seminal monograph *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006) and continued to refine later on. According to him,

transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story. (Jenkins, 2011, para. 4)

Although the term *transmedia storytelling* might seem to be fairly inclusive, according to Jenkins' definition, a repetitive reproduction of a story across different media alone does not belong to the realm of transmedia storytelling. In Jenkins' definition, he clarifies that each medium should make "its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story" (Jenkins, 2011, para. 4). Although every reproduction or adaptation of a story in a different medium inevitably extends or adds to the existing story to some degree, Jenkins emphasizes that transmedia storytelling requires that the story world is further developed through each medium. Each new text or new variation has to make a "distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 96) and it has to add to our understanding of the story as a whole. Jenkins calls this characteristic "additive comprehension," which is a term coined by game designer Neil Young. Every new variation has to participate in the world-building process. Jumping across different media alone is not enough to make a transmedia story.

Although additive comprehension is a prerequisite for a transmedia story, Jenkins explains that additive comprehension is only possible through a combination of *radical intertextuality* and *multimodality*, the latter term coined by Gunter Kress in his seminal work *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication* (2010). Jenkins (2011) defines radical intertextuality as "a movement across texts or across textual structures within the same medium" (para. 13). As an example, he mentions the Marvel cinematic universe. The existing set of dozens of Marvel superhero films and television shows makes use of the same elements, including characters, plots, and events in different combinations. Therefore, we can call these films radically intertextual.

Radical intertextuality alone, however, is not enough to generate additive comprehension, according to Jenkins. Only if a radically intertextual story is played out across different media does additive comprehension, and therefore transmedia storytelling, become possible. Given that different media require different modes of representation, a transmedia story adopts multiple modalities. Multimodality points to the fact that, for example, a novel, a comic, a film, or a game represents the same story in a different mode. Jenkins argues that only the combination of radical intertextuality and multimodality makes additive comprehension possible, and he makes very clear that he understands additive comprehension as a prerequisite for transmedia storytelling. In summary, by Jenkins' definition, a transmedia story is a radically intertextual story that is played out across different media, and each new text adds to our understanding of the story as a whole.

Based on this definition, I argue that transmedia storytelling is not only "The Future of Storytelling" as, for example, the *Transmedia Manifest* (Costa-Zahn et al., 2011) suggests, but it is also part of the history of storytelling. Folklore studies from at least as early as the 1970s show that the idea

to understand a story through its variants is not a new one. In his seminal work *Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, the Danish folklorist Bengt Holbek (1987) uses, for example, variants of the fairy tale *King Wivern* to examine the overall story (pp. 457–498). Katharina Young (1987) explains in *Taleworlds and Storyrealms: The Phenomenology of Narrative* that according to performance theories of folklore, a “story” can be understood as being part of discourse framed as performance (pp. 157–158). She describes storytelling as a conversation among multiple participants; each participant helps to build the story universe. In addition to folklore studies, some important work in adaptation studies (Hutcheon & O’Flynn, 2013; Krasilovsky, 2018) or scholarship on the story universes of *The Tale of Genji* (Emmerich, 2013), *The Three Kingdoms* (Kwon, 2010), *Mulan* (Idema, 2010), or *Cinderella* (Herrnstein Smith, 1980) show that, long before digitization, radical intertextuality and multimodality built dynamic story universes.

Here, I offer *The Journey to the West* as case study of a transmedia story that started to build its world hundreds of years ago. In addition, although this study is based on Jenkins’ definition of transmedia stories, I would suggest that Jenkins fails to extrapolate from his definition of transmedia storytelling any useful methods for approaching transmedia stories and working with them. In Jenkins’ writing, transmedia stories seem to be ungraspable and are usually referred to as abstract “story worlds” (Jenkins, 2011), “infinite story universes” (Costa-Zahn et al., 2011), or “bottomless texts” whose depth and breadth make it “impossible for any one consumer to ‘get it’” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 127). Complementing Jenkins’ theory of transmedia storytelling, I propose a way to grasp a transmedia story by making use of Roland Barthes’ concept of dynamic texts. In essence, I argue that we can understand dynamic texts as hotbeds for transmedia storytelling.

I first give a short overview of the story universe of *The Journey to the West*. I then introduce Barthes’ theory of dynamic texts and explain how this concept can inform a receptive and critical approach to transmedia stories. Specifically, I show how the variations that build the universe of a transmedia story can be understood as creative recombinations of integral elements that recur in the variations of the story. In conclusion, I directly apply this concept to a selection of Korean variations of the story and visualize the story universe of *The Journey to the West* by mapping it with the help of radial tree diagrams.

The Story Universe of *The Journey to the West*

The Journey to the West 西遊記 (China: *Xiyouji*; Japan: *Saiyūki*; Korea: *Sōyugi*; Vietnam: *Tây du ký*) is a story world that has been part of the literature and art of several Asian cultures for centuries under a title that translates to “Journey to the West.” I intentionally use the abbreviated English title *The Journey* in this article to emphasize that this story persisted without regard to the boundaries of periodization and national literatures. In the academic realm, *The Journey to the West* is generally identified with the Shidatang edition of the 100-chapter novel allegedly written by Wu Cheng’en in China at the end of the 16th century, and so, by using the shortened title I emphasize that the dynamic story universe at the center of this work is importantly distinct from the static Shidatang variation of the story.

For readers who are unfamiliar with *The Journey* story universe novel, the Shidatang edition provides an adequate orientation to the basic elements. The novel tells the story of the Monkey King Sun Wukong who protects the Buddhist monk Tripitaka during his odyssey from China to the Western Heaven

in the search for the real Buddhist scriptures. Besides Sun Wukong, Tripitaka is accompanied by three more disciples: Zhu Bajie (the pig), Sha Wujing (the monster), and a dragon horse. The novel starts with Sun Wukong's miraculous birth out of a stone, describes his career as Monkey King at Flower-Fruit Mountain, and tells how Patriarch Subhūti teaches him supernatural abilities. He defeats every antagonist with the help of the Compliant Rod. Sun Wukong's battle culminates in his fight against all heavenly authorities including Laozi, known as the first philosopher of Daoism. When even the Jade Emperor, who reigns in Heaven, sees no way to defeat Sun Wukong, Buddha comes to help and makes a bet with Sun Wukong. He promises to yield to Sun Wukong if the monkey manages to jump out of his palm. Sun Wukong fails and is, thus, imprisoned beneath the Five-Phases Mountain for the next 500 years.

In the meantime, Bodhisattva Guanyin begins to search for a pilgrim who can find the real Buddhist scriptures in the West, and he settles on the monk Tripitaka. Tripitaka can free Sun Wukong from the Five-Phases Mountain, and he offers to do so on the condition that Sun Wukong accompanies and protects him on his journey to the West. He controls the monkey by means of a cap or headband Sun Wukong wears on his head that hurts whenever he is not obedient. After he encounters and accepts the other disciples, Tripitaka's actual odyssey begins.

Following this, there are approximately 30 episodes that repeat a pattern:

1. The pilgrims encounter hindrances on their journey, mostly in the form of monsters and demons from a variety of religious backgrounds.
2. Sun Wukong contrives a plan to overcome the hindrances, which often involves his supernatural abilities and the help of Buddhist advisors.
3. The monsters and demons are defeated.
4. The pilgrims happily continue the journey.

This simple repetitive pattern lends itself particularly to intertextual borrowing and creative variations. Elements of *The Journey* have appeared in endless variations and recombinations both inside and outside Asian cultures, so that *The Journey* cannot be considered a singular, static work, nor can it be considered a set of variations on an "original" text. The idea of the original is an illusion that is inextricably linked to the Romantic cult of originality, but it does not play a role in transmedia storytelling. I explicitly focus here on variations that put *The Journey* into a new context. Similar to the Marvel cinematic universe, *The Journey* is a radically intertextual story world that appears in forms as diverse as TV series, comics, novels, animated cartoons, plays, roof ornaments, pagoda reliefs, and a mask dance.

The following review of a print cartoon or *manhwa* variation of *The Journey* (Ko, 2006) shows how important the role of additive comprehension is for creating the story universe of *The Journey*. Here, one reader uses different variations of *The Journey* in different media to expand his familiarity with the story world of *The Journey*. Obviously, every new variation adds to the reviewer's understanding of the whole.

As a student I read *The Journey* more than five times. First I read a story titled *Son Ogong* [Chinese: Sun Wukong] in a collection of fairy tales. Later I came across a story titled *Sōyugi* [*Journey to the West*] as part of a series for world classics. And then I read a *Sōyugi* that was thick and really close to the original. I can say that I have enough background knowledge to feel familiar with the contents of *The Journey*. . . . I think this work [Ko Uyōng's *manhwa*] is ideal. It's faithful to the original while still including the interpretation of the author. . . . But strictly speaking it's not really faithful to the original. . . . Many episodes are left out. But who needs to know all episodes? (Mogyōn, 2010, paras. 2–4)

The reviewer expresses concern about the faithfulness of Ko Uyōng's *manhwa* to the "original." However, he does not specify what he considers the "original" of *The Journey*. Still, he emphasizes the knowledge he has about *The Journey* and proves this knowledge by referring to three variations he has read: a fairy tale, an adaptation as part of a series for world classics (probably a book for children), and a "thick book." He concludes by praising Ko Uyōng's *manhwa* as being faithful to the "original," while admitting that many episodes are left out and then minimizing that fact: "But who needs to know all episodes?" Obviously, we do not need to read all episodes to be able to say that we know *The Journey to the West*.

Roland Barthes' Theory of Dynamic Texts as a Means to Approach Transmedia Stories

Jenkins calls *The Matrix* universe (of the 1999 film) a "bottomless text" that is impossible to be grasped by any one consumer. This also rings true for the case of *The Journey*. Each variation expands our understanding of *The Journey*, but it seems to be impossible to grasp the whole infinite universe of the story. To find a way through transmedia stories, I put forward Roland Barthes' concept of dynamic texts as a means to approach story worlds.

Barthes' (2009) reflections in his manifesto "From Work to Text" are relatively vague, but they can help us get an idea of how to understand transmedia stories such as *The Journey* as dynamic texts rather than static works. Barthes does not mention transmedia stories in his manifesto at all; he does, however, develop the concept of dynamic texts by questioning the conventional preference for stable literary works. Barthes' concept of a dynamic text has much in common with Jenkins' understanding of transmedia stories. Thus, Barthes' concept of dynamic texts can offer us tools for working with transmedia stories. His ideas are particularly helpful for this case study as I attempt to move away from thinking of *The Journey* as a static work in the form of a Chinese novel and toward thinking of *The Journey* as a transmedia story, or as a dynamic text in the form of many variations. In the following, I sum up the main points of Barthes' manifesto.

For Barthes (2009), a "work," or static work, "can be seen" (p. 157) because it is an "object that can be computed" (p. 156), whereas a "text," or dynamic text, "is a process of demonstration" (p. 157). A static work can be "held in the hand," whereas a dynamic "text is held in language" (p. 157). Although we can understand the 16th-century Chinese novel of *The Journey to the West* as a static work that can be seen and held in hand, *The Journey* in all its variations is a dynamic text that can be understood as a process of demonstration, or as a "dynamic experience" (White, 2012, p. 130). We cannot hold *The Journey* in our

hands, because as a dynamic text it “cannot stop; . . . its constitutive movement is that of cutting across (in particular, it can cut across the work, several works)” (p. 157). Because *The Journey* as a dynamic text cuts across its variations and lives through them, it cannot be reduced to one variation or one edition. While cutting across several works, *The Journey* also cuts across different media and by doing so adopts multiple modalities, as Jenkins would say. *The Journey* cannot be reduced to one single work; as the literary theorist Jonathan Culler (2011) explains, “The idea of the original is created by the copies” and “the original is always deferred—never to be grasped,” because it is “produced as an effect of signs, of supplements” (p. 12).

This necessarily leads to the conclusion that the text is plural. Barthes (2009) clarifies that this does not simply mean that a given dynamic text has multiple meanings. The plurality he refers to stems from the fact that a text is written from multiple perspectives and uses multiple codes. Although the codes may be familiar, “their combination is unique” (p. 159). As we see in the next sections, the variations of *The Journey* have been written from diverse points of view and put together in unique combinations. *The Journey* is a veritable *salmagundi* of uncountable variations, undeniably an example of a plural text that is radically intertextual. Barthes is careful to distinguish this intertext “in which every text is held” from “some origin of the text”—he cautions that “to try to find the ‘sources’ is to fall in with the myth of filiation” (p. 160). He adds that a text should not be understood as an organism, but rather as a network (p. 161). Whereas some folklorists tend to perceive variants of a story as parts of an organism and discuss which variants might be more or less fully developed (Holbek 1987, p. 477), I avoid this categorization to stress the equality of variations. Thus, I understand *The Journey* as network, or story universe, and the variations as equal, multifaceted variations of *The Journey*, each adding to our understanding of *The Journey* universe.

Creative Recombinations of Integral Elements as Building Blocks for Transmedia Stories

Although Barthes’ theory of dynamic texts as opposed to static works can easily be applied to transmedia stories and helps our understanding of story worlds, there is still an urgent need to develop a new terminology for such dynamic texts as *The Journey*. Barthes makes very clear that what Jenkins would call transmedia storytelling can also be found in the past, but the strong preference for stable literary works has controlled our perception for such a long time—at least since the Romantic cult of originality (Broich, 2007, p. 178)—that dynamic texts or transmedia stories seem to be a new phenomenon. Transmedia storytelling seems to open our eyes to a phenomenon that has existed for hundreds of years that we have not been able to perceive because of our focus on stable works. Although we have become aware of story worlds like *The Journey*, we still lack the tools to grasp them. In the next section, I bring the ideas of several scholars from various backgrounds into the dialogue, including Wilt L. Idema from Chinese literature, Michael Emmerich from Japanese literature, and Henry Jenkins, to sketch out some ideas for how we might grasp transmedia stories—if not their whole story universes, at least the skeletons of them.

Among scholars of Chinese literature and history, one of the most prolific authors in the field of dynamic texts is without doubt Wilt L. Idema. Idema’s books (Idema, 2008, 2010, 2014; Idema & Grant, 2008; Idema & Kwa, 2010; Idema & West, 2013) present English translations of radically intertextual dynamic texts whose “original” sources cannot be clearly defined. For example, in the case of the legend of *Meng Jiangnū*, Idema stresses that “there is no single essential tale of Meng Jiangnū; there are only many versions, each with its own idiosyncrasies” (Idema, 2008, p. 22). Although the tale of Meng Jiangnū lives

through its many variations, people still tend to perceive it as a stable work. Idema adds, "While almost every Chinese knows about the legend nowadays, few except specialists are aware of the immense richness and variety of its many versions in late-imperial times and in the popular traditions of the twentieth century" (Idema, 2008, p. 5).

Like *The Journey*, the texts Idema presents can all be understood as dynamic story worlds in that they circulate as variations without any precisely definable origin. Idema does not devote much space to the question of what these texts actually are, but he leaves random notes in the introductions that might help us to develop a new terminology. On *Mulan*, for example, he states that over the centuries "Mulan has been reiterated," but "a few basic elements have remained constant" (Idema, 2010, p. xi) in the variations. Although Idema does not specify how these "basic elements" appear in the variations, he nevertheless acknowledges that some elements remain constant even as the context varies.

It is an expert of Japanese literature who most clearly articulates the need to overcome our scholarly dependence on allegedly stable texts. In *The Tale of Genji: Translation, Canonization, and World Literature*, Michael Emmerich (2013) makes the argument that the reception of *The Tale of Genji* was actually a "replacement" of it. Given the immense popularity of the story, Japan is sometimes even referred to as "the country of *The Tale of Genji*" (Emmerich, 2013, p. 3). Emmerich, however, clarifies that it is actually not the "(unknown and unknowable) original" (p. 14) that is responsible for this popularity, but "replacements" of it in the form of translations, adaptations, *manga* versions, a 2,000-yen banknote that features a scene from the tale, or the *Genji monogatari* Millennial Anniversary Matcha Baumkuchen. In his introduction he argues that

there is a need for a new terminology more in tune with the shift that has already occurred, away from a focus on supposedly stable classic texts themselves and toward an interest in the mutable history of books and other material forms, in the processes by which new *images* of texts are produced. I propose that we think in terms not of reception, but of a more engaged notion of *replacement*. (p. 10)

Emmerich chooses the term *replacement* instead of *reception* to emphasize the creativity that is involved when the author of a variation creates a new place in the present for a dynamic literary narrative. He emphasizes that the idea of the "original" is illusory in the case of *The Tale of Genji* and that it is not any "original" that made the story popular in the world. This is also true of *The Journey*. As a dynamic story world, *The Journey* has no original and has become popular through its variations. This also means that the search for the "original" is futile for both *The Tale of Genji* and *The Journey*. It is not the case that the "original" of both stories has not been discovered yet; in the case of transmedia stories, the "original" simply does not exist.

If Idema notes the continuity among variations of a dynamic text and calls our attention to "the elements" that "have remained constant," Emmerich makes us aware of the radical breaks and creative changes that happen in replacements or variations of *The Tale of Genji*. Jenkins calls the elements of a fiction that are dispersed across media "central" (2006, p. 111) or "integral" (Jenkins, 2011). He explains, "No given work will reproduce every element, but each must use enough that we recognize at a glance that these

works belong to the same fictional realm” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 112). I suggest taking account of both continuity and breaks, analyzing variations as creative “recombinations” of integral elements that appear in the variations of *The Journey*. It is, of course, not possible and not my aim to define the exact number of elements that are affiliated with *The Journey*; instead, I want to be able to visualize *The Journey* as a dynamic story world and to get an idea of the variability of *The Journey*. I focus on a selection of 67 basic elements that recur in the variations in ever-new combinations. Table 1 shows the heuristic element pool for *The Journey* used in this article, which includes 12 characters, three objects, six places, six motifs, the title (*The Journey*), the author (Wu Cheng'en), and 38 episodes.²

Table 1. Element Pool for The Journey.

12 Characters	3 Objects	6 Places	6 Motifs
Monkey	Compliant weapon	Flower-Fruit Mountain	Transformation
Monk	Headband	Five-Phases Mountain	Cloud soaring
Pig	Scriptures	Heaven	Magic of shortening the ground
Sand Monster		West	Supernatural abilities
Horse		Thunderclap Monastery	Travel
Jade Emperor		Tang	Monsters and hindrances
Subhūti			
Buddha			
Taizong			
Guanyin			
Bull Demon King			
Laozi			
38 Episodes			
1. Havoc in Heaven	14. Dragon King in Black River	27. Lion-Camel Mountain	
2. Search for Scripture Pilgrim	15. Cart Slow Kingdom	28. Bhiksu Kingdom	
3. Tripitaka's Childhood	16. Heaven-Reaching River	29. Bottomless Cave	
4. Taizong in Underworld	17. Great King One-Horn	30. Dharma Destroying Kingdom	
5. Grand Mass	18. Women State	31. Phoenix-Immortal Prefecture	
6. Recruitment of Disciples	19. Two Sun Wukongs	32. Jade-Flower District	
7. Widow and Three Daughters	20. Mountain of Flames	33. Gold-Level Prefecture	
8. Ginseng	21. Golden Light Monastery	34. Kingdom of India	
9. White-Bone Lady	22. Poetry at Brimble Ridge	35. Squire Kou	
10. Scarlet Purple Kingdom	23. Small Thunderclap	36. Obtaining the Scriptures	
11. Silver Horn & Golden Horn	24. Tuluo Village	37. Last Ordeal	
12. Black Rooster Country	25. Scarlet-Purple Kingdom	38. Return to the East	
13. Red Boy	26. Cobweb Cave		

² Tim Tangherlini (2018) develops a similar model to visualize narratives that takes into account not only actants (people, places, things), but also relationships and sequencing. The actant-relationship model can definitely be applied to *The Journey*, but because the main aim of this study is the visualization of the dynamic nature of the story universe, I use the simpler radial tree diagrams and combine them as animation in the Conclusion.

Each of the episodes (see Table 1) has a number that appears at the node that symbolizes the episode in the radial tree diagram. The nodes in the diagrams appear in seven colors according to the category the elements belong to. Each class of nodes is at a fixed distance from the center. Characters can be found closest to the center, followed by objects, places, motives, title, author, and episodes. To help visualize which of the elements of *The Journey* can be found in the variations, each variation described in the next section is accompanied by a radial tree diagram.

Mapping *The Journey* Universe From the 14th Century to Today

In the final part of this article, I present a selection of six Korean variations of *The Journey* universe, including a webtoon, a K-drama, reliefs on a pagoda, a lantern festival, a mask dance, and roof decorations. Although an investigation of all variations of *The Journey* around the world would be an interesting project, the time and resources required for such a project are prohibitive. Here, I exclusively focus on Korean variations of *The Journey*. The variety and richness of variations of *The Journey* in Korea legitimize my rhetorical stance that the Korean variations may be considered a representative subset of all variations around the world. Among the Korean variations, I specifically chose a set whose interaction could be experienced during one day in Seoul.

Yi Mallyŏn's Webtoon The Journey

Popular webtoon author Yi Mallyŏn published *The Journey*, or *Sŏyugi*, weekly as a webtoon in 135 episodes on the South Korean online platform Naver from December 4, 2013, through September 4, 2016 (M. Yi, 2013–2016). He recombines integral elements of *The Journey* universe and mixes them with humorous references. For example, the headband by which Sun Wukong is tamed, in this case a hair band that looks like a crown, only hurts when Tripitaka sings Pak Sangch'ŏl's old-fashioned trot song "Unconditionally" ("Mujogŏn"), which is widely known in South Korea. In addition, the Buddhist scriptures the pilgrims receive at the end are actually *manhwa*, which Buddha is said to have especially created to make it easier for everybody to attain Buddhahood.

Although we can find most of the integral characters, objects, places, and motifs of *The Journey* in this variation, Yi Mallyŏn selects only a couple of the basic episodes (see Figure 2). He uses 43 of the 135 webtoon episodes to depict the Havoc in Heaven episode, which ends with Sun Wukong's imprisonment under the Five-Phases Mountain. So, this one episode element alone takes up more than one third of the plot in the webtoon. After this, Yi Mallyŏn seems to jump back and forth in the universe of *The Journey*. He starts with the Silver Horn and Golden Horn episode (Part 65), continues with the Red Boy episode (Part 68), and then jumps back again to the Ginseng episode (Part 75). Based on the element pool in Table 1, the webtoon jumps from Episode 11 to 13 and then back to Episode 8. Yi Mallyŏn explicitly mentions the names of the episodes as they are generally known; for example, he announces that the pilgrims are in Cart Slow Kingdom (Part 106) or in Scarlet Purple Kingdom (Part 122), but he does not follow the order of the episodes as they appear in the Chinese novel. More important, he frequently mixes several episodes. Red Boy, for example, appears in several episodes. In short, Yi Mallyŏn's webtoon variation of *The Journey* is a good example of how elements of *The Journey* can be mixed in a range of

combinations. Yi Mallyŏn does not necessarily retell the Chinese novel; he might just as well have “retold” any other variation of *The Journey*.

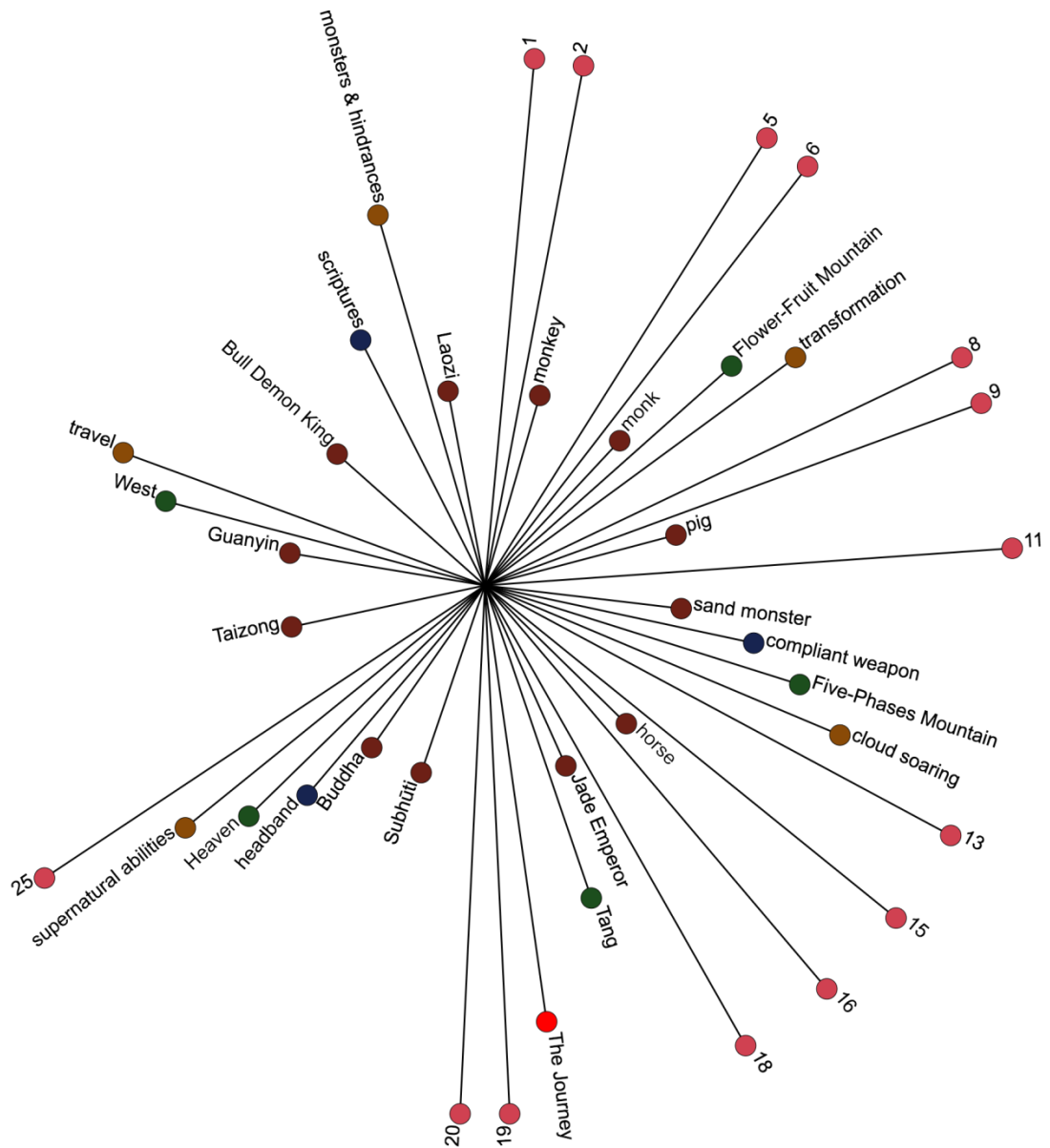


Figure 2. Radial tree: Yi Mallyŏn's Journey.

In fact, it is very clear that Yi Mallyŏn is aware of other variations. The radical intertextuality of *The Journey* becomes evident when in Part 42 of the webtoon, just before Sun Wukong is defeated by Buddha, we can see Sun Wukong reading *Dragon Ball* to find out how he can become stronger. *Dragon Ball* is one of the most popular variations of *The Journey* and was created by Akira Toriyama. Yi Mallyŏn does not follow the story line of *Dragon Ball*, although he is clearly aware of it and may have been inspired by it. Transmedia stories seem to encourage the recipients to become part of the story universe themselves and to complement it with their own thoughts. The line between the production side and the audience thus becomes blurred. Each variation can be understood as verifiable traces of productive reception.

Also, the title of this variation suggests that the author wants his readers to understand *The Journey* as a dynamic text that lives through its variations. He called his webtoon *Yi Mallyŏn Sŏyugi*, which means *Yi Mallyŏn's Journey to the West*. The fact that the author's name is incorporated into the title emphasizes that what we read is *The Journey*, but *The Journey* told from the perspective of Yi Mallyŏn. His title draws attention to the idea that there is not one single *Journey*, but many variations of it. In total, Yi Mallyŏn recombines 40 of the integral elements of *The Journey* universe.

The K-Drama Hwayugi

The Journey universe also includes a K-drama that is not called *Journey to the West*, but instead *Journey to Harmony*, or *Hwayugi* and 和遊記 (J. Yi & Park, 2017–2018). It was aired from December 23 in 2017 to March 4 in 2018 on tvN and tells the story of Chin Sŏnmi, a beautiful and successful realtor. Chin Sŏnmi, who is also Tripitaka in the show because she is said to be a reincarnation of the monk, works with Sun Wukong, a monkey spirit, and the spirit of the Bull Demon King to bring light into the dark world ruled by bad spirits in today's South Korean society. In addition to her career as a real estate agent, Tripitaka also has the ability to see ghosts and expel evil spirits. In this variation, Sun Wukong had once been an immortal in the heavenly realm; however, after committing a serious crime in heaven he was imprisoned in the Five-Phases Mountain. Here, the Five-Phases Mountain is symbolized by five candles that hold Sun Wukong captive that cannot be put out by Sun Wukong himself. When as a young girl Tripitaka first meets the imprisoned Sun Wukong, he asks her to put out the candles and offers in return to serve as her guardian. She only has to call his name, he promises, and he will appear in front of her. Chin Sŏnmi or Tripitaka frees Sun Wukong, but once freed he uses a trick to make her forget his name. Twenty-five years later he meets Tripitaka again. She remembers him and with the help of heavenly powers she attaches an armband—a variation of the more common headband—to Sun Wukong's wrist. In other variations, the headband hurts whenever Sun Wukong is not obedient to Tripitaka, but in the drama the armband makes Sun Wukong fall in love with her. The armband in combination with the fact that Tripitaka appears as a woman in this drama give *The Journey* universe the chance to develop a romantic plot that cannot be found in many variations.

Hwayugi demonstrates how *The Journey* persists through its variations in which a selection of its integral elements are recombined and put into ever-new contexts. We can find 21 integral elements in this variation in Figure 3.

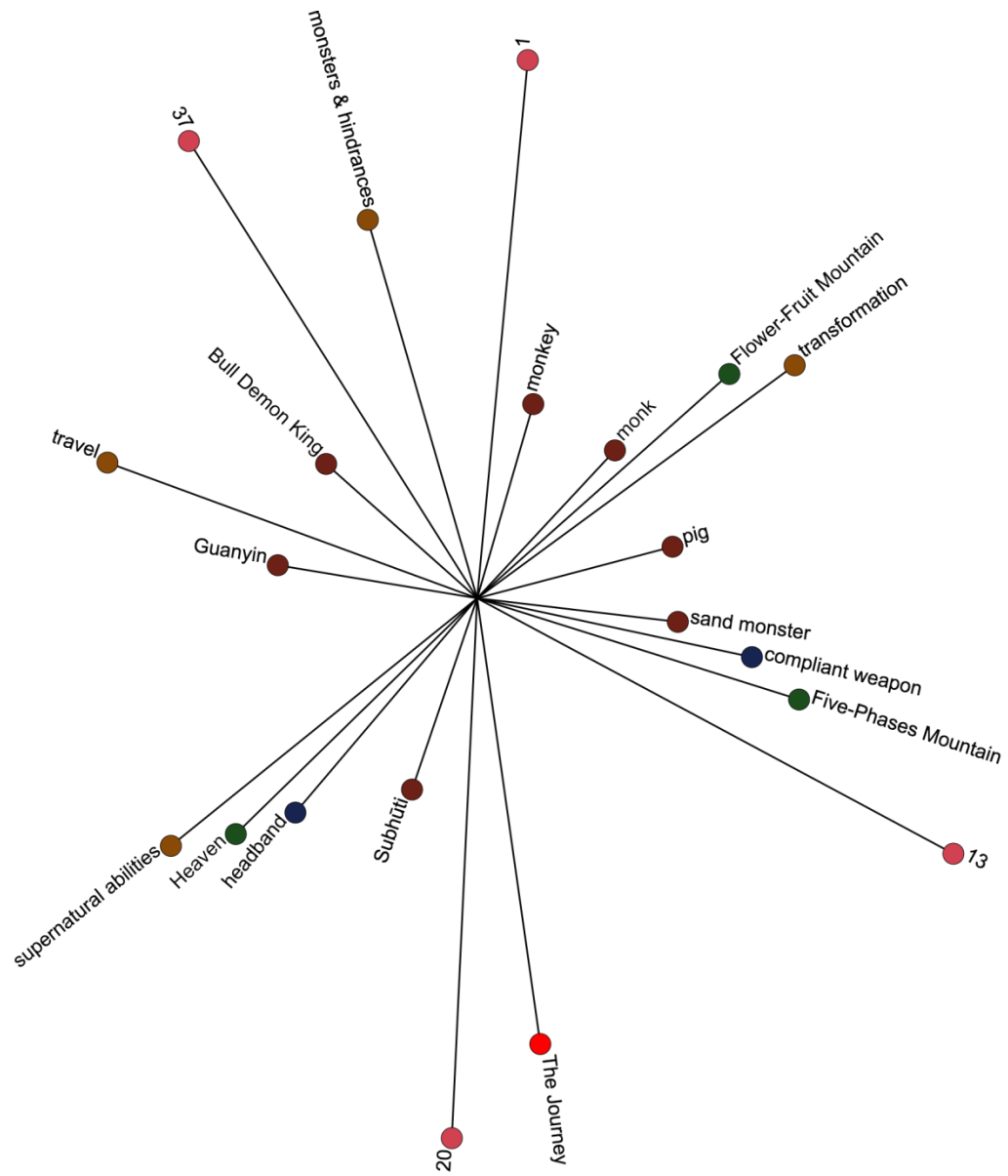


Figure 3. Radial Tree: Hwayugi.

The Journey as Reliefs on Pagodas

The oldest Korean variation of *The Journey* can be found in form of reliefs on the 10-story pagoda of the Kyŏngch'ŏn Temple (1348), which is now preserved in the National Museum of Korea in Seoul (see Figure 4). It depicts 12 episodes of *The Journey* in 22 scenes. Given that the pagoda was built more than 200 years before the 16th-century Chinese novel, it has not been mentioned in any studies on the "reception" of *The Journey* in Korea.



Figure 4. The 10-story pagoda of Kyŏngch'ŏn Temple at the National Museum of Korea. Source: <https://www.museum.go.kr/site/main/relic/recommend/view?relicRecommendId=16858>

On the pagoda's 10 stories are depicted Buddhist symbols or narratives often derived from Buddhist scriptures. Most of them do not allude to *The Journey*. Twenty-two panels depicting scenes of *The Journey*, however, can be found in the second story of the stylobate, the place that visitors notice first (Sin, 2006, p. 79). It is significant, then, that this very central place of the pagoda features not scenes from Buddhist scriptures, but rather a variation of *The Journey*. Furthermore, this variation embeds *The Journey* in a religious context.

With regard to the characters, on the pagoda we can find all of the pilgrims, Emperor Taizong, and Guanyin. Sun Wukong the monkey is shown with his compliant rod, and we can easily identify scriptures on the back of a horse. The 12 episodes that are depicted on the pagoda also include the Red

Boy episode. In Figure 5, we see Guanyin slightly to the left of the middle, with a halo and riding a wave. On the right is Tripitaka on the shoulders of one of his disciples. And in the middle, we see the Red Boy sitting in a flower. In the Red Boy episode, Guanyin transforms everything into an ocean as part of his strategy to block Red Boy's attacks and finally capture him. The scenes on the Kyŏngch'ŏn Pagoda suggest that many of the episodes of *The Journey* universe were known more than 200 years before the traditional novel. Visitors were expected to be familiar with the story to recognize them on the pagoda in a Buddhist context.

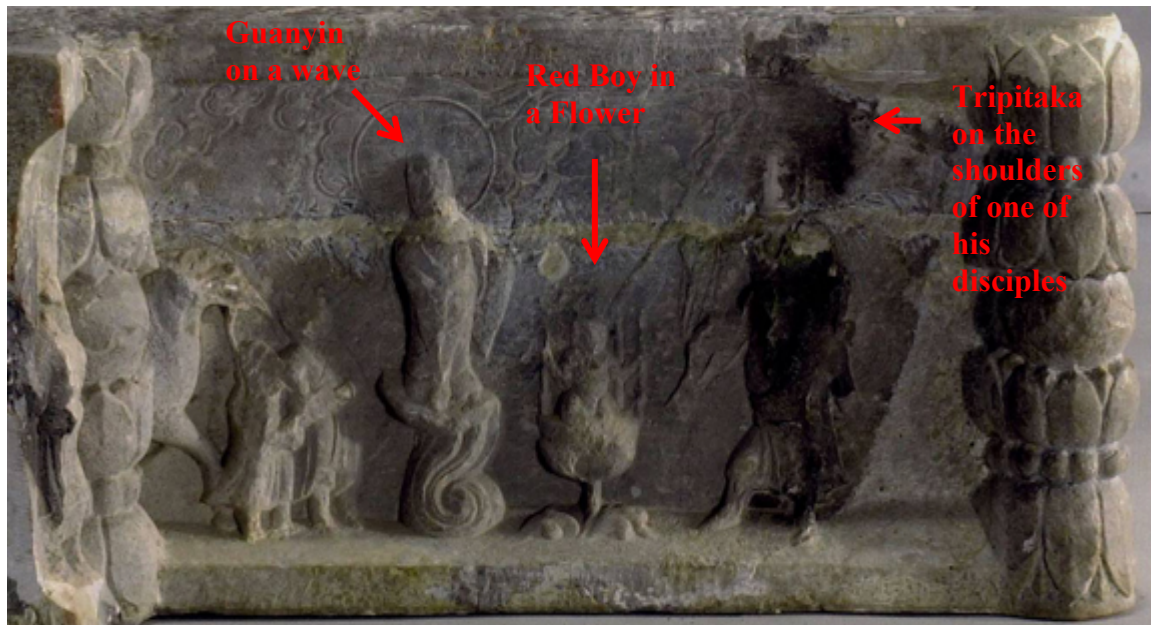


Figure 5. The Red Boy Episode on the Pagoda of the Kyŏngch'ŏn Temple. Source: <https://www.museum.go.kr/site/main/relic/recommend/view?relicRecommendId=16858>

At least 21 of the integral elements of *The Journey* can be found on the reliefs (see Figure 6).

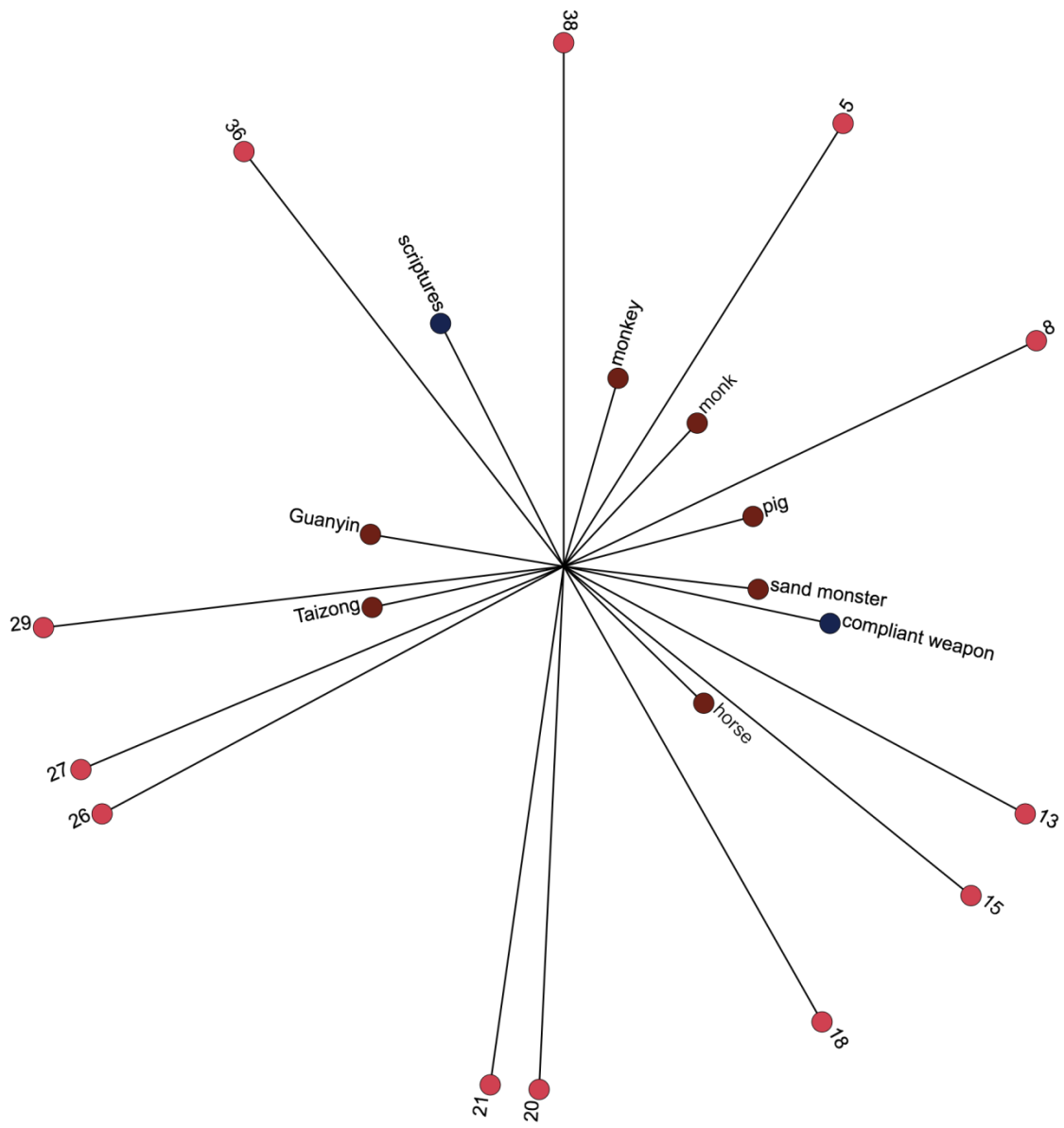


Figure 6. Radial Tree: Pagoda.

Seoul Lantern Festival 2017

The Seoul Lantern Festival 2017 primarily used the characters and their weapons, as well as one of the motifs of *The Journey* universe. Besides Sun Wukong (see Figure 7), the festival included lanterns portraying Zhu Bajie, Sha Wujing, and Tripitaka's—or, at least, the horse that was supposed to accompany Tripitaka.



Figure 7. Sun Wukong at the Seoul Lantern Festival 2017. Source: Author.

When I visited the Seoul Lantern Festival on November 19, 2017, the lantern of the monk Tripitaka was missing, which resulted in a commotion among visitors who wanted to take a picture with Tripitaka, shouting, "Tripitaka, where have you gone?" This incident shows how familiar many people are with *The Journey* universe and how each of the variations interacts with other variations of *The Journey*. This familiarity, however, does not reduce consumers' openness to experiencing new variations of *The Journey* and to learning more about the story world in new contexts.

The lanterns were supposed to show Zhu Bajie and his rake, Sha Wujing, the horse, the monk, and Sun Wukong and his Compliant Rod. A close inspection of the picture of Sun Wukong in Figure 7 reveals that he is actually riding a cloud, which alludes to his ability of cloud soaring. In addition, he is wearing his headband, which is depicted as a ring around his head. The lanterns recombine eight integral elements of *The Journey* universe (see Figure 8).

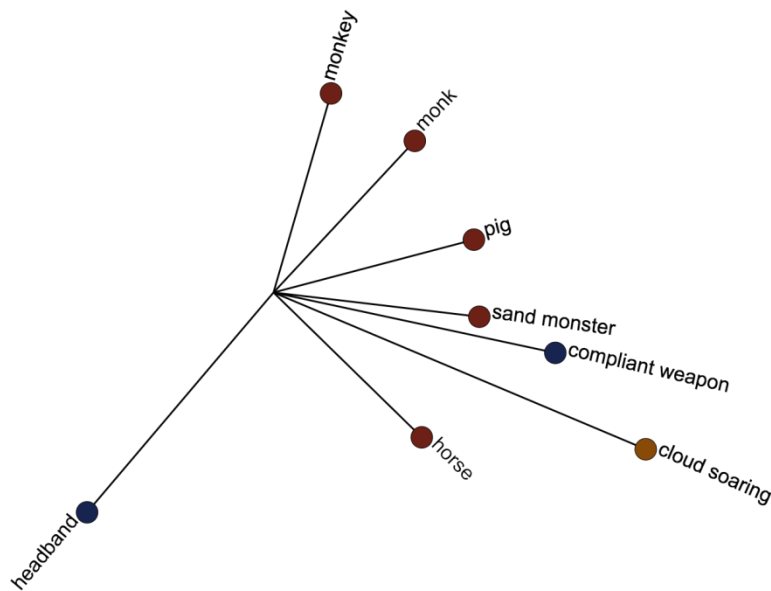


Figure 8. Radial Tree: Lantern.

Pongsan Mask Dance

The Pongsan Mask Dance also contributes to *The Journey* universe. Pongsan is now a county in North Hwanghae Province of North Korea. Located along the route from the Korean capital to China, during the Chosŏn Dynasty, Pongsan not only served as a trade center for agricultural products, but also as a place for merchants and envoys who passed through the region to find entertainment. It is not clear

when the Pongsan Mask Dance was performed for the first time. The part of the lion dance that is relevant to my study of *The Journey* universe was probably added in the late 19th century or even later (Im, 1957, p. 222).

Generally speaking, the Pongsan Mask Dance tells the following story. It begins with a Buddha-like monk who is reading the Diamond Sutra, and who is visited by a Mephisto-like friend in a temple. What follows is the whole temple's descent into corruption. This process can only be stopped by the appearance of a white lion that is not willing to reveal its identity until one monk realizes who the lion is.

Now, I think, I know who you are! During the Tang-period when the weather was dry in Black Rooster Kingdom and all people complained about it, the king invited you. With supernatural power you made it rain and, thus, won the king's favor. You could live in the palace as you pleased and enjoyed great honor. However, then you buried the king alive in the marble well of the imperial garden, transformed instead yourself into the king and lived in wealth and honor for three years. When Tripitaka, who was on the way to the Western Heaven to find the Buddhist teachings, stayed at the Baolin Temple, the King of the Black Rooster Kingdom whom you had buried alive appeared in the monk's dream. Afterwards, Tripitaka's best disciple, pilgrim Sun, the Great Sage, Equal to Heaven, who had caused uproar in Tuṣita Heaven, finally realized your real nature and you had escaped by only a hairbreadth. Thanks to the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī's help you barely survived, and you became the lion he used to ride on. That's you, isn't it? (O, 2002, p. 41)⁴

When the lion nods his head, the corrupt monks ask why he has come and starts to whip him (see Figure 9). However, after the lion has killed one of them, the others are filled with remorse and promise to return to the Buddhist teachings. This passage references the Black Rooster Kingdom episode of *The Journey*. In the Black Rooster Kingdom episode, it is the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī himself who sends the lion to the Black Rooster Kingdom to punish the king because at some previous point the king had not recognized Mañjuśrī and mistreated him when Mañjuśrī had appeared in front of the king in the form of an ordinary monk. In both *The Journey* and the Pongsan Mask Dance, the lion is sent by Mañjuśrī to punish someone who had violated Buddhist concepts.

⁴ English translation by the author. Three scripts exist of the Pongsan Mask Dance performance in 1936—one each by O Ch'ŏng, Song Sŏkha, and Im Sŏkchae. Although O, Song, and Im recorded the same performance, their scripts differ from each other. However, the passage quoted here remains consistent in all three versions.



Figure 9. The Lion Dance. Source: CedarBough T. Saeji, "The Lion in the Pongsan Mask Dance."

Although performances of the Pongsan Mask Dance today vary, this version uses seven integral elements of *The Journey*: the monk, the monkey, Heaven, the West, Buddhist scriptures, the Havoc in Heaven episode, and the Black Rooster Kingdom episode (see Figure 10).

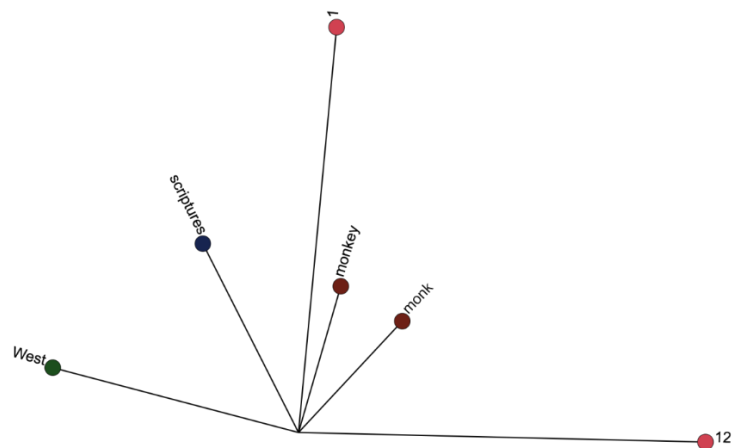


Figure 10. Radial Tree: Pongsan Mask Dance.

The Journey on the Top of Royal Palaces

The Journey has also been visible on the rooftop of Korean royal palaces for the last 350 years in the form of roof ornaments (see Figure 11).



Figure 11. Kyŏngbok Palace, Kŭnjŏng Hall. Source: Lee Dong Myong, "Roof Ornaments on Kŭnjŏng Hall."

The Royal Palaces are among the most popular sightseeing destinations in Seoul today, and the roof ornaments on the palaces catch the eye of many visitors. What many do not realize is that some key palace roof ornaments also tell the story of *The Journey*. At the time, *The Journey* appeared as roof ornaments in the 17th century, which was a strong Confucian—and at the same time anti-Buddhist—atmosphere that pervaded Korean royal palaces. How did *The Journey*, whose Buddhist background can hardly be denied, rise to the top of these centers of Confucianism?

The first mention of the names of these common roof figures appears in Yu Mongin's (2004; 柳夢寅, 1559–1623) miscellaneous tales *Ōu yadam* 於于野譚.:

When newly appointed officials meet their predecessors for the first time, they have to be able to tell the names of the ten divine figures on top of the palace gates for ten times. . . . The names are Master of Great Tang (Taedang sabu, 大唐師傅 [Tripitaka]), Pilgrim Sun (Son haengja, 孫行者 [Sun Wukong]), Zhu Bajie (豬八戒), [and] Monk Sha (Sa Hwasang, 沙和尚 [Sha Wujing]). (M. Yu, 2004, p. 132)

On Yu Mongin's list of roof ornaments, four of the main characters of *The Journey* are included. By his account, the roof ornaments as variation of *The Journey* can be visualized as shown in Figure 12.

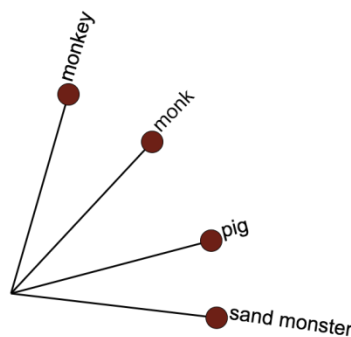


Figure 12. Radial Tree: Roof Ornaments.

Interestingly, there are also nonfictional records of these roof ornaments that are part of *The Journey* universe. The *Ch'angdökkung suri togam üigwe* 昌德宮修理圖監儀軌,, an official record of repair works of the Ch'angdök Palace in 1647, explicitly mentions "Sun Wukong" to identify a roof ornament. From this, "Sun Wukong" also became associated with the nails by which the roof ornaments were fixed (Chang 2004, p. 8), which came to be called "(Son) haengja taech' öl" (孫)行者帶鐵, or Pilgrim Sun-nails).⁵ This suggests that Sun Wukong was at some point considered representative of all roof ornaments—and this was not a custom that was imported from China. Roof ornaments in China were arranged so that one immortal occupied the first position, and animals (e.g., dragons, phoenixes, lions, etc.) were behind it (Li, 1990, p. 277). In Korea, however, all of the main characters of Korean roof ornaments were based on *The Journey*, which is surprising because Confucianism was the official state ideology during the time these roof ornaments were installed, and the general atmosphere was anti-Buddhist. Moreover, Chinese novels were officially disrespected. Yi Töngmu's (李德懋, 1741–1793) critique of *The Journey* reflects the official opinion about novels in general at that time:

⁵ See, for example, [*Sunhoe seja*] *Sangsi pong'wön togam üigwe* [順懷世子]上諡封園都監儀軌, 1755 in e-kyujanggak.

<http://kyujanggak.snu.ac.kr/home/index.do?idx=06&siteCd=KYU&topMenuId=206&targetId=379> .

I have already read *The Journey* and *The Three Kingdoms* long ago. But when my father learned about it, he scolded me: "These literary excrescences tarnish the official history and ruin the minds of their readers. How could I, as strict teacher and good father, let you indulge in such books?" I took his words to heart and never read historical or popular novels again. (Yi Tǒng-mu, n.d., p. 87))⁶

At the time, *The Journey* was widely criticized by scholars, which suggests that *The Journey* universe must have enjoyed a huge popularity. Surprisingly, its Buddhist background was generally not the target of this criticism. Thus, it is conceivable that Sun Wukong as roof ornament might also not have been primarily associated with Buddhist ideas. It is important to remember that it was not the monk Tripitaka, but the monkey Sun Wukong who became the main character among the roof ornaments in Korea, perhaps because it was just too much to have a Buddhist monk on the roof of a grand building at the center of Confucianism. Because Sun Wukong was seen not as a Buddhist disciple, but rather as a fighter who defeats all evil demons, the Sun Wukong roof ornament thus embodies the traditional function of roof figures as guardians against fire and evil spirits (Li, 1990, p. 276).

The fact that Sun Wukong was mentioned in nonfictional records as a roof ornament in the first half of the 17th century suggests that Sun Wukong was not only widely known by this time, but that his image as a guard or fighter against evil spirits was strong enough that most people overlooked or did not know of the character's roots in a Chinese novel with a Buddhist background. As the use of the term "Pilgrim-Sun nails" shows, Sun Wukong was so common as a roof ornament that it was representational of them in general. Like written and oral texts, the roof ornaments as variation of *The Journey* show the variability of the narrative. Although *The Journey* is strongly influenced by Buddhist ideas in other variations, as roof ornaments in the late Chosŏn Dynasty, its association with Buddhism was so downplayed that it was used to decorate the very centers of Confucianism. Thus, like a chameleon, *The Journey* succeeds in adapting to ever new and often contradictory contexts, unfolding its radical intertextuality across multiple media.

Conclusion

In this article, I have traveled through one part of the universe of *The Journey*—six variations that span centuries and yet could, in theory, all be experienced today in a one-day visit to Seoul, Korea—to show that transmedia storytelling is not only the future of storytelling, but also part of its history. On the way, I have suggested that our preference for static works has obscured our awareness of dynamic story worlds, which in turn has made the concept of transmedia storytelling seem like a new phenomenon. In addition, I have offered Roland Barthes' theory of dynamic texts as a possible method for approaching and grasping story universes like *The Journey*. Drawing from the ideas of various scholars from media and literature studies, I propose thinking of a story's "variations" as the building blocks for transmedia stories, and I define "variations" as creative recombinations of integral elements that recur in the dynamic text.

⁶ English translation by the author.

To demonstrate how this might work, I have applied this approach to six Korean variations of *The Journey*, including a webtoon, a K-drama, reliefs on a pagoda, a lantern festival, a mask dance, and roof ornaments. This case study illuminates the radical intertextuality as well as the multimodality of *The Journey* universe. Each variation is accompanied by a radial tree diagram, and all six diagrams taken together give an idea of how dynamic and variable *The Journey* universe is. I would suggest that it is exactly the variability of dynamic texts that makes them ideal for transmedia storytelling.

Let us come back once more to Henry Jenkins' argument that the universes of transmedia stories are too broad and deep to be grasped. The tree diagrams in the article are a way to visualize each variation, but how could the whole story universe be grasped?

This animation in Figure 13 is based on the six variations that I examined in this article, and it shows how, with a dynamic text such as *The Journey*, the universe "text" can start to be grasped in the similarities, differences, overlap, and interactions among several variations. Additional variations, presented in the same manner of the radial trees, fill in the open spaces in the center of the tree and confirm or expand the outer "boundary" of the story's universe. Although the radial tree diagrams and the animation serve as relatively simplistic heuristics, they make the dynamic nature of transmedia stories visible. I hope that these methods will also be helpful to grasp other story universes in the broader world of transmedia storytelling.

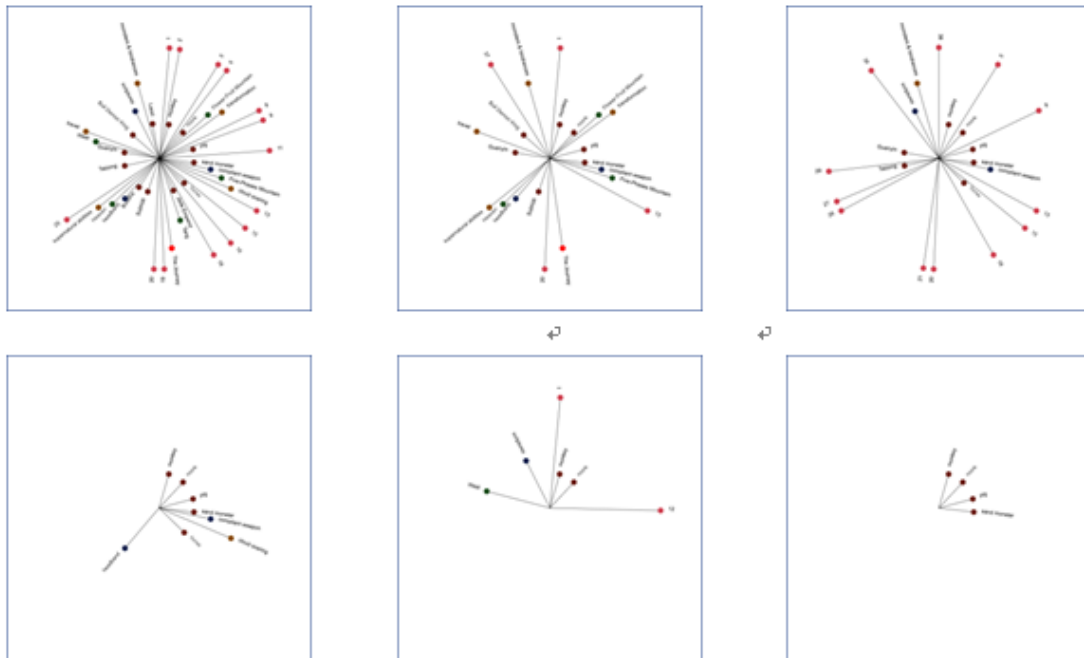


Figure 13. The Journey to the West universe in motion. <https://youtu.be/7y42lvkNLqc>

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